

BUERGER'S DISEASE

CLAIMS/RESPONSES

CLAIM: Some smokers have to have their legs amputated because of "smoker's leg."

RESPONSE: This is probably a reference to Buerger's Disease. Individuals who have this problem with the blood vessels in their arms or legs may have to have the limb amputated if it becomes so serious that they develop gangrene.

This claim apparently is made about cigarette smoking because it has been reported that a high percentage of patients who have the disease are smokers. However, the claim overlooks the fact that nonsmokers also develop this disease.¹ It also overlooks the many medical and scientific "unknowns" about this disease. For example, it is not even known for certain how many people who have been diagnosed with this disease actually have it. That's because it's a rare disease, and mistakes in diagnosis are quite common, in part because there are numerous other diseases with very similar symptoms. For example, an American researcher who reviewed 205 cases that had been diagnosed as Buerger's Disease at one hospital between 1933 and 1963 reported that only 33 of

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the cases, or about 16%, met the clinical criteria for a true diagnosis of Buerger's Disease.² If physicians have such difficulty even determining if a person has the disease, how can anyone claim that it has been proven what causes it?

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REFERENCES

1. Juergens, J.L., "Chapter 16: Thromboangiitis Obliterans (Buerger's Disease, TAO)." In: Peripheral Vascular Diseases. Philadelphia, W.B. Saunders Company, J.L. Juergens, J.A. Spittell and J.F. Fairbairn, II (eds.), 469-491, 1980.
2. Herman, B.E., "Buerger's Syndrome," Angiology 26(10): 713-716, 1975.

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CLAIM: Smoking must cause Buerger's Disease because the disease gets worse in those who keep on smoking and gets better in those who stop.

RESPONSE: This claim overlooks the fact that nonsmokers also develop the disease.¹ It also does not take into account studies which report contradictory findings.² For example, in one study of more than 300 Japanese patients with the disease, the symptoms reportedly did not progress in many of the patients who continued to smoke and actually did progress in a few patients who stopped.³

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2. DeBakey, M.E. and Cohen, B.M., Buerger's Disease: A Follow-Up Study of World War II Army Cases, Springfield, Illinois, Charles C. Thomas, 1-143, 1963.
3. Ohta, T. and Shionoya, S., "Fate of the Ischaemic Limb in Buerger's Disease," British Journal of Surgery 75(3): 259-262 (at 261), March, 1988.

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